



(Photo by Sgt. Robert Yde 2-1 Cav. Public Affairs)

Opening weekend!

Pvt. Richard Gray (left) of Battery A, 3rd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, Pfc. David Flores of Company C, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, prepare to square off during the "Black Jack Boxing Fight Night Tournament" May 5. Soldiers from the throughout the 2nd "Black Jack" Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, participated in the first of two weekends of fights at Forward Operating Base Union III in Baghdad. (See story page 4)

Zafaraniya District youth have a place to grow

By Spc. Courtney Marulli
2-2 Inf. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE LOYALTY, Iraq - After months of renovations and hard work, the youth center in the Zafaraniya neighborhood of Baghdad's Karadah District opened its doors to the public May 2, giving Iraqi youth a safe place to call their own. This project encompassed months of planning and hard work and more than half a

million dollars went into the renovations.

The modern youth center is bright pink, a vibrant color reflecting the attitude of those operating it. The place will serve as a fun haven for children and young adults. It has come a long way from the run-down building it once was.

"The local government is extremely excited about opening of the youth center," said Sgt. 1st Class Jimmy E. Smith, the civil and military operations non-

commissioned officer for 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. "They want to start over and train the youth at soccer, who may one day train at the Olympic level."

Smith, of Tucson, Ariz., said the center offers a variety of classes in drama, art and workshops for women where they can learn special skills such

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Balad Ruz safer four months after major operation

By Sgt. Armando Monroig
5th MPAD

BALAD RUZ, Iraq -- Four months after U.S. troops and their Iraqi Army counterparts launched a massive military operation in the villages Turki, Hamoud and 30 Tamuz, what was once an insurgent safe haven is now considered one of the quietest places in Diyala.

During the massive, nine-day assault dubbed "Turki Bowl II," which concluded Jan. 13, about 100 insurgents were killed and 54 were detained for suspected involvement in terrorist activities in the area.

The operation, led by the 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, from Fort Bragg, N.C., yielded weapons caches containing more than 1,100 Katyusha rockets, 1,500 rocket-propelled grenades, 500 mortars and a variety of materials used to make roadside bombs, called Improvised Explosive Devices.

The area is now considered



(Photo by Sgt. Armando Monroig 5th MPAD)

Soldiers from the 5th Squadron, 73rd Cav. Regt., and soldiers from the 5th Iraqi Army Division conduct a search of a village near Balad Ruz, Iraq, April 28.

under control by Iraqi and Coalition Forces, which has established a joint patrol base in Turki to maintain a constant presence there.

"It's quiet. Four months before the operation, I saw the shooting of (local leaders), many IEDs, the road was dangerous," said 1st Lt. Ali, a company commander in 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 5th Iraqi Army

Division.

"Now, it is safe. No terrorists are in this area, because the Iraqi Army and U.S. Army always patrol together."

Ali and his soldiers share the responsibility of running the patrol base with their U.S. counterparts, who confirm a decrease in the level of violence in the area.

"Since we've been out here

after Turki Bowl II, things have been pretty quiet," said Sgt. Brandon Herron, from Troop B, 5-73 Cav. Regt. "With all the IA check points in the area, the incidences of IEDs have cut down dramatically.

"We've pretty much rooted out all of the enemy in the area. They've either fled, been captured or are lying low. I think having the IA and our presence out here has made a huge difference in the security of this area," Herron said.

Despite the improved security in the Balad Ruz area, Staff Sgt. Donald McElroy said there's still a possibility that his unit will find more insurgents while patrolling the canals and villages assaulted by coalition forces in January.

"I believe that those who weren't killed, detained, and were lucky enough to get out of here, still come back," said McElroy, also from Troop B. "That's why we continue to patrol, because you never know."

Arabic Phrase of the Day

nuss

Defined:
half

Iraq 3-Day Weather Report



Today

High: 102
Low: 73



Tomorrow

High: 102
Low: 73



Thursday

High: 100
Low: 73

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Youth center opens in Zafaraniya District

Youth

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as sewing and computer use. Sports programs are also offered for soccer, boxing, weightlifting and martial arts, Smith added.

The center has come a long way.

Before the renovations, the building was falling apart, wires stuck out and soccer fields were flooded with sewage.

No one used the center and more than a dozen internally displaced families had moved in.

Those families tapped into the sewage and water lines, which flooded the soccer fields.

Prior to 2003, the youth center was the second largest youth facility in Baghdad, said 1st Lt. Robyn M. Jacobs, the civil and military operations officer for 2-17th Field Artillery.

Jacobs, a native of Colorado Springs, Colo., said the project was taken over from the previous unit.

The renovation project was nominated by the neighborhood and district councils and brought to the



Soldiers from 1st Bde., 9th IA Div. and local athletes assemble outside the youth center in Zafaraniya prior to a grand opening ceremony for the center May 2.



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Bronco Suzuki 2-2 Inf. Public Affairs Office)

The Zafaraniya District Advisory Council chairman, Dr. Muhammad, cuts a ribbon during a ceremony commemorating the grand opening of the youth center in the Zafaraniyah neighborhood of east Baghdad's Karadah District May 2. Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division worked with community leaders to complete major renovations at the center.

attention of coalition forces as a priority.

Dr. Muhammad, the Zafaraniya District Advisory Council chair, said this is the only youth center in the area. The district has 72 schools.

Muhammad thanked the United States for providing them with the budget to help get the center running again.

The United States provided the equipment that had been looted during the war.

Muhammad said the next step is to get the fields groomed for soccer and to build a swimming pool.

He said he also wants to incorporate more activities for girls and young women, and to eventually create a marathon of Zafaraniya.

"It's very important for Baghdad," he said.

The entire renovation process went well, Smith said, as contractors and local agencies fixed things they saw that needed to be done.

"There was a lot of interaction

with the contractor and local agencies and they worked together to make it complete," Smith said. He said the local Iraqis seemed pretty motivated to be out working on the youth center.

The contractor the coalition forces used to complete the project had approximately 100 employees, with at least 80 percent of the work force coming from the local area, Jacobs said. It gave residents work while making improvements to their neighborhood.

"It was a community effort," Jacobs said.

Smith said it was important to get the youth center open so they could provide the Iraqi youth with different choices, allowing them the opportunity to get away from situations where they may get involved violence.

"We may have the next body-building champion come out of that gym," Smith said, "because they had a positive source for their energy."

Tournament kicks off opening weekend

By Sgt. Robert Yde
2-1 Cav. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE UNION III, Iraq - After several weeks of preparation, the "Black Jack Boxing Fight Night Tournament" kicked off May 4 with Soldiers from throughout the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division.

Several hundred Soldiers were on hand to watch the first weekend of the two weekend event, which is being hosted by 3rd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment and 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment in a bombed-out foyer in the former Ba'ath Party Headquarters where the 3-82nd FA is based.

Fourteen fights were held May 4 and 5, with winners advancing to the second weekend. The championship bouts are scheduled for the evening of May 13.

"This was kind of like an opening fight night," said Spc. Timothy Dunbar, 3-82nd. "Next Friday and Saturday we close out the brackets. We needed to close down some fights this weekend and the winners will take on each other next week"

Dunbar, a Lowell, Mass. native, headed up the effort in constructing the ring and organizing the event and said that the first night met all of his expectations.

"I think the overall outcome of it was very good, and I think everyone had a good time," he said. "That's the biggest thing - everyone enjoying themselves, that's what we're looking for."

Dunbar added that while one of the main focuses was for everyone involved to have a good time, it was just as important to maintain the safety of the boxers. Much of this responsibility fell into the hands of those who volunteered to referee and



(Photo by Sgt. Robert Yde 2-1 Cav. Public Affairs)

Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Sanchez lands a blow to the face of 1st Lt. Gabriella Caldara during the "Black Jack Boxing Fight Night Tournament" May 5 at Forward Operating Base Union III in Baghdad.

judge the event.

"I put a PowerPoint presentation together and gave them all a brief before," Dunbar said of the training he provided the referees and judges. "We just went over the safety issues because the biggest thing we were stressing was safety because the mission is first over here. They definitely did a good job."

Each bout was three rounds, each a minute-and-a-half, with 45 seconds between each round. While that may not sound like a lot of time, according to Spc. Christopher Thomas, who won the first fight of the night, fatigue can definitely set in quickly if a fighter is not properly conditioned.

"It seems like it's not a lot of time because it's only four-and-a-half minutes and you get to rest 45 seconds between each round, but when you're fighting for a whole minute-and-a-half, it's definitely a gruesome, tiring sport,"

Thomas, a Camden, N.J. native with Co. C, 1-5 Cavalry, explained. "Boxing is the most tiring sport. You can get hurt seriously and the whole goal is to hurt the other person, so you've got to stay in shape. You've got to definitely train harder than you work."

Thomas, who started boxing during his last deployment to Iraq in 2004, said he was impressed with the quality of the ring, and that it felt good being able to get back into a boxing ring.

"The ring's perfect and the floor felt great," he said. "My legs were burning, and I was a little bit nervous in the beginning, but once you start throwing punches and once you get hit a little bit, all that goes out the window."

Although several of the participants, such as Thomas, had some prior experience boxing, for many of the Soldiers, this was the

first time they had ever stepped into a ring.

"I thought it would be a challenge," said Spc. Mary Gordon, explaining why she decided to participate in the tournament. "I used to play other sports, and I wanted to try doing this. It's one-on-one, and it really challenges somebody."

Although she lost her match, Gordon, originally from Bellingham, Wash., said the experience was a good one and she hopes to participate in future tournaments.

Throughout the night, the fighters seemed to feed off of the energy of the enthusiastic crowd.

"The crowd reacts to what they see going on, and since it's them up there - it's the representation of their group that's up there - when their fighter is doing good, they're going to be doing good," said Pfc. Timothy Iuchs, one of the event organizers with 3-82 FA. "I'm just glad that the guys got into it and they took it seriously."

Dunbar agreed with Iuchs that the crowd's reaction was one of the greatest contributors to the atmosphere of the fight night.

"You put two guys in the corners, each representing their own unit; everyone wants to be the loudest and everyone's proud of their unit," Dunbar said. "I think it builds up good morale and team camaraderie."

After seeing the turnout and success of the first weekend, Iuchs, originally from Sedalia, Mo., said that he expects an even larger, louder crowd for next weekend's championship bouts.

"I think the crowd will increase now that the word's out about the atmosphere and how everybody feels about it," he said. "It's just going to get bigger and better."